



Meeting the Moment in an Unprecedented Year

Lawyers Defending American Democracy - 2025 in Review



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UPHOLDING THE RULE OF LAW AND DEMANDING INTEGRITY FROM LAWYERS

The commencement of the second Trump administration in January 2025, brought a series of fresh challenges to the rule of law and the constitutional, procedural, and substantive principles that underlie it. This year, the administration took repeated actions to deny due process not just in individual cases, but at scale. It ignored court orders and misrepresented facts and the law to federal judges. It steamrolled separation of powers.

Constant rhetoric from the administration and its supporters has undermined public confidence in these core foundational principles of the American system of government, principles that protect American liberty.

Since our formation in 2019, the mission of Lawyers Defending American Democracy (“LDAD”) has been to stand up for principles of democracy and the rule of law, to take actions to further that cause, and to organize and mobilize lawyers and others to do the same. **It is critical for people of good will to stand up for these as transcendent principles, not subjects of political debate on television talk shows or on the internet.**

Tens of thousands of lawyers – and in 2025, groups of law students – have answered the call.

This is our fourth annual report detailing LDAD’s accomplishments. Since our founding, LDAD has worked to hold accountable those who breach their obligations as attorneys and undermine the rule of law. Part of LDAD’s focus has been not only to articulate and emphasize these principles, but also to take action to ensure they are more than just theoretical constructs. We have worked with leading experts to file ethics complaints against lawyers who violated the Rules of Professional Conduct. We worked with renowned scholars to file *amicus curiae* in federal courts opposing lawless government

actions. We shared our message in the press and opinion columns; presented in classrooms and to professional audiences; and collaborated with other democracy organizations.

This year, we launched one of our most important initiatives to date, “[Meeting the Moment – A Call for Lawyers to Lead.](#)” This initiative is an organized effort to encourage and support lawyers to use their skills and expertise to engage their communities in real-world action to educate the public on the importance of the rule of law and the core principles that make the American way of life possible.

Even with all of the progress LDAD has made to galvanize lawyers and to act to protect these core principles, too many lawyers, law firms, and law schools remain silent – and, through their silence, are complicit. Too many people still believe the embrace of dishonesty and the undermining of institutions is just “politics as usual.” And too many lawyers similarly argue that taking sides in a struggle to defend the centuries-old values of individual liberties and restraints on executive power is somehow engaging in politics.

LDAD’s message is simple: Adhering to these principles is not optional. It is our obligation to live up to the oath we took to become an attorney. We welcome, admire, and will do all that is in our power to support those who join the struggle to protect our justice system and the rule of law. You are not alone.



As we enter 2026, there is some good news. More lawyers than ever are speaking out and standing up for the rule of law, including thousands of new signers of LDAD's commitments. Several bar associations have disciplined lawyers for failing to adhere to applicable Rules of Professional Conduct, which is also a betrayal of their oaths. And courts across the country are increasingly undertaking their critical role as a co-equal branch of government. There remains a tremendous amount of work to be done, but as more and more join in the fight the outcome becomes increasingly clear: democracy and the rule of law will prevail.

LDAD AND THE FIGHT TO PROTECT DEMOCRACY

Protecting democracy starts by defining what, exactly, democracy *means*.

In 2019, [LDAD articulated](#) what we determined are core principles that represent the foundation of democracy. These principles are embodied in eight pillars, each of which inform LDAD's actions against those seeking to undermine them.

These core principles are:

- The rule of law;
- Institutional checks and balances;
- The separation of powers;
- The independence, integrity, and critical role of media;
- The independence, integrity, competence, and non-partisanship of the judiciary;
- Truthfulness of public officials;
- The independence, integrity, competence and non-partisanship of federal criminal justice and intelligence agencies, including the Department of Justice and FBI; and

- Civil discourse and fair treatment including respect for rights and the dignity of all individuals, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity.

These principles are embodied in LDAD's [Democracy Commitment](#), which many lawyers have signed. We continue to highlight these principles, which are foundational to all that we do.



TAKING ACTION

LDAD's approach is to be nimble and responsive to current events, while at the same time working to combat systemic threats. In these efforts, we have pursued a broad range of activities, including:

Open Letters/Calls to Action on a variety of critical topics, signed by thousands of lawyers across the country and around the world;

Statements, prepared by LDAD's Board of Directors, where we speak out in response to actions that weaken our democratic institutions;

Ethics complaints against attorneys where available information reveals professional misconduct that can undermine our democracy and the rule of law;

Amicus briefs in federal and state court cases involving serious threats to democracy, the rule of law, and/or the justice system;

Organizing and supporting lawyers across the country to take action, including engaging their communities to understand the importance of joining the fight to protect truth, freedom, and other core principles of democracy;

Working with the next generation of lawyers, as an increasing number of law school students volunteer to work with us;

Supporting local LDAD chapters, starting with our first chapter, in Maryland;

Reports on emerging threats to democracy, including a compendium of anti-democracy actions in states across the country;

Regular communications through updates, analyses, and requests for action, including newsletters to our tens of thousands of supporters, all available on the [LDAD website](#), as well as [LinkedIn](#) postings, and our emerging presence on [Bluesky](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).

Press releases and other outreach in support of our statements, open letters/calls to action, amicus briefs, ethics complaints and other LDAD initiatives;

Collaborating with other organizations and prominent individuals on matters of common interest;

Op-Eds, letters to the editor, and other public statements in support of our mission

by Board members, volunteers, and other friends and supporters.

All of our work is easily accessible on the www.LDAD.org web site.

Here are highlights of some of our key accomplishments over the past year.

Ethics Complaints

Since its inception, LDAD has pioneered the preparation and filing of ethics complaints with state bar disciplinary authorities that seek to hold accountable attorneys who have violated the Rules of Professional Conduct in service of efforts to undermine core principles of democracy.

LDAD has taken great care to file these complaints with the support and help of renowned ethics practitioners, including from the states in which we file. Our focus is always to analyze the record and seek accountability only where the record — legally and factually — supports the case that discipline is merited.

The ethics and disciplinary process must *never* be politicized. We bring a deliberate and rigorous manner in analyzing whether to file any complaint, working in close coordination with leading ethics experts. The process of preparing and filing any complaint is thorough, characterized by extensive research and consideration, and reflecting the highest levels of professionalism.

All of the complaints LDAD has filed are available [here](#). In 2025, we filed the following (and are currently undertaking the detailed research necessary to support other future actions related to the disciplinary process).

Motion to Ask Federal Court Judge to Consider Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove's Conduct (S.D.N.Y. March 3, 2025).

LDAD led a group that included State Democracy Defenders Fund and other legal and ethics experts in submitting an *amicus* brief in

New York Mayor Eric Adams’ federal criminal case. The filing asked the federal judge in the case to consider the potential ethical violations entailed in Deputy AG Bove’s conduct under the Rules of Professional Conduct and the Principles of Federal Prosecution. These violations included an implicit *quid pro quo* between DOJ and Mr. Adams.

Ethics Complaint Against Pamela Jo Bondi (The Florida Bar, June 5, 2025). LDAD joined Democracy Defenders Fund, Lawyers for the Rule of Law, and dozens of attorneys, law professors and former judges in filing this complaint against the Attorney General of the United States. The complaint describes three instances in which Ms. Bondi sought to compel DOJ lawyers to violate their ethical obligations under the guise of “zealous advocacy.”

In the simplest and most alarming example, Ms. Bondi and her deputy, Todd Blanche, fired an experienced and accomplished attorney, Erez Reuveni, for telling the truth before a tribunal in the case involving Kilmar Garcia, who was deported to El Salvador due to an administrative error, and contrary to a court order that he not be deported to that country. The second example is the forced resignation of Denise Cheung, who had served in the Department for nearly a quarter century, when she declined to open a criminal investigation because there was insufficient predication. And the third example was when the Department proposed to dismiss the criminal indictment of Mayor Eric Adams of New York without prejudice in exchange for Mr. Adams’ assistance on immigration enforcement. Because the dismissal was based on an improper *quid pro quo*, the Acting U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York and almost a dozen other lawyers in that office and the Department’s Public Integrity Section objected to the proposed dismissal. As a result, they were forced to resign immediately or placed on administrative leave and later resigned.

The complaint was filed notwithstanding The Florida Bar’s reply to two previous ethics complaints filed against Ms. Bondi that it “does

not investigate or prosecute sitting officers appointed under the U.S. Constitution while they are in office.” The Florida Bar’s purported rationale – unsupported by history or precedent – is that such action “could encroach on the authority of the federal government concerning these officials and the exercise of their duties.”



Petition for a Writ of Mandamus against The Florida Bar (July 15, 2025). LDAD and other advocates for the rule of law asked the Florida Supreme Court to order The Florida Bar to follow its own rules and fully investigate claims that Pamela Bondi, who is a member of the Bar and the Attorney General of the United States, has acted unethically. The filing was made after The Florida Bar rejected the complaint against United States Attorney General Pam Bondi in June 2025.

Jamie Conrad, a long-time volunteer with Lawyers Defending American Democracy and a principal author of the complaint and the petition, said: “Attorney General Bondi and her team cannot be allowed to operate the Justice Department free from compliance with the same ethics rules applicable to all other lawyers. The AG frequently states that ‘no one is above the law.’ The Florida Bar needs to demonstrate that this includes her.”

Florida Supreme Court Rejects Writ of Mandamus Petition (October 14, 2025). The Florida Supreme Court ruled that Jon May, the Florida lawyer who filed the bar complaint and the mandamus petition, lacked a legal right to

demand that The Florida Bar follow its own rules and investigate claims that Attorney General Pamela Bondi has acted unethically.

“The Florida Supreme Court has effectively said that as long as Pam Bondi is the Attorney General of the United States, she is not subject to any discipline by the Florida Bar for violations of ethics rules,” said LDAD Executive Director Lauren Stiller Rikleen. “This means that the highest-ranking lawyer in the Department of Justice need not comply with the same code of ethics that all other lawyers must follow.”

Disbarment of Kenneth Chesboro (June 26, 2025). Chesebro, who served as a lawyer for the Trump campaign in the aftermath of the 2020 election, was disbarred in New York after a decision by a panel of the NY Supreme Court. LDAD had filed an ethics complaint against Mr. Chesebro with the New York Grievance Committee on October 12, 2022. In its decision, the Court’s panel rejected Mr. Chesebro’s arguments contesting the application of the New York rule that a felony conviction in any jurisdiction results in suspension or disbarment in New York. The Court concluded that disbarment was the appropriate sanction because, in addition to having committed a “serious crime,” Mr. Chesebro’s conduct “strikes at the heart of the administration of justice” and “undercuts the very notion of our constitutional democracy that he, as an attorney, swore an oath to uphold.”

Disbarment of Jeffrey Clark (Board of Professional Responsibility, Washington, D.C., July 31, 2025). In 2021, LDAD filed an extensive complaint against Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Clark – a complaint that was also signed by many prominent members of the DC Bar. The complaint alleged that Clark’s post-election efforts sought to pressure Justice Department leaders to issue a knowingly false statement that there was evidence of significant fraud in the 2020 presidential election.

On July 31, 2025, in a comprehensive Report and Recommendation that demonstrates what

accountability looks like, the DC Board of Professional Responsibility recommended that Clark should be disbarred for his efforts to assist in undermining the integrity of that election. LDAD’s analysis was substantially identical to the ruling by the Board. In its recommendation, the Board stated:

“Lawyers cannot advocate for any outcome based on false statements and they certainly cannot urge others to do so. Respondent persistently and energetically sought to do just that on an important national issue. He should be disbarred as a consequence and to send a message to the rest of the Bar and to the public that this behavior will not be tolerated.”

The Board’s decision now goes to the DC Court of Appeals for a final decision. Mr. Clark will be suspended from the practice of law while the Court of Appeals considers the matter unless the Court of Appeals grants his motion in which he argues there is a substantial likelihood he will succeed on his appeal. Mr. Clark has also filed a motion to bifurcate the appeal in which he argues that the Court should first decide whether he is immune from the disciplinary authority of the DC Bar.

Amicus Briefs

Consistent with its mission, LDAD may file amicus briefs in cases where core principles of democracy are implicated.

Each of the amicus briefs LDAD has filed may be found on the LDAD website [here](#), including all of the briefs we filed in 2025.

***United States v. Eric Adams*, Brief of Amicus Curiae State Democracy Defenders Fund, Lawyers Defending American Democracy, and Individual Experts in Legal Ethics, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, Case No.: 24 Cr. 556 (DEH), (March 3, 2025).** This brief was filed in Mayor Adams’ federal criminal case. The filing asked the federal judge in the case to consider Deputy Attorney

General Emil Bove’s conduct under the Rules of Professional Conduct and the Principles of Federal Prosecution.

On March 19, 2025, LDAD and others submitted a letter brief to supplement the *amicus* brief previously filed. The new filing urged the federal judge to address the threshold issue of whether the Government’s motion to dismiss the indictment is “tainted with impropriety.”

***Perkins Coie v. United States Department of Justice*, Brief of Lawyers Defending American Democracy as *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Plaintiff Perkins Coie LLP’s Motion for Summary Judgment, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Civil Action No. 1:25cv-00716(BAH) (April 3, 2025).** LDAD filed an *amicus* brief in support of Perkins Coie, LLP and in defense of the fundamental independence of the legal profession. The brief was in response to a sweeping executive order issued by President Trump against the law firm.

At its core, the presidential edict is a draconian effort to prevent the firm from representing clients the President does not like and taking positions that are contrary to his views. The President’s order is also an effort to create widespread fear that could upend fundamental tenets of the legal profession, including the right of all clients to choose their attorney and to be zealously represented. The order interferes with the duty of the firm’s lawyers to represent clients without interference. It places these attorneys at risk of violating their ethical obligations as a result of their fears of having to limit issues they can raise in court to avoid potential future punishment from the administration.

This executive order is part of an unprecedented and aggressive effort to undermine the independence of the legal profession and to coerce top law firms into capitulation, as several of the world’s most prestigious firms had done. Perkins Coie chose to defend itself and, in so doing, took a stand on behalf of the rule of law and the justice system in the United States.



***Jenner & Block, LLP v. United States Department of Justice* Brief of Lawyers Defending American Democracy as *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Plaintiff Jenner & Block, LLP’s Motion for Summary Judgment, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Civil Action Civil Action No. 1:25-cv-00916(JDB)(April 18, 2025).** LDAD filed an *amicus* brief in support of Jenner & Block LLP’s lawsuit opposing President Trump’s issuance of an Executive Order that strikes at the very heart of the independence of the legal profession.

As the *amicus* described, the President seeks to “condition law firms’ ability to practice law and serve their clients on the President’s approval of their conduct.” This presidential edict against Jenner, along with other law firms, has been part of an overall effort to intimidate and control the legal profession, punishing firms for their past conduct and preventing future representation adverse to the President or even the federal government.

***Susman Godfrey LLP v. Executive Office of the President, et al.*, Brief of Lawyers Defending American Democracy as *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Plaintiff Susman Godfrey LLP’s Motion for Summary Judgment, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Civil Action No. 1:25-cv-1107 (LLA) (April 30, 2025).** LDAD filed an *amicus* brief in support of Susman Godfrey LLP’s lawsuit opposing President Trump’s Executive Order, calling it “a serious intrusion by the executive branch on the authority of the judicial branch to regulate the conduct of lawyers.”

As the amicus described, the Order “represents an unprecedented effort by the executive to undermine the independence of the legal profession by subjecting it to the whims of the President. Such independence is necessary to enable lawyers to fulfill their duty to represent clients without interference from any other party, especially the government. By threatening law firms, the Order also attempts to limit the issues that lawyers can raise in courts. This is a fundamental challenge to the rule of law, because it seriously weakens the ability of the legal system to serve as a check on the exercise of executive power.”

LDAD is grateful to its principal authors, LDAD co-founder and board member Gershon ("Gary") Ratner and Georgetown University Law Center Professor and LDAD board member Mitt Regan.

***LULAC et al. v. Executive Office of the President, et al.* (Brief of Lawyers Defending American Democracy as *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Non-Partisan Plaintiffs Motion for Partial Summary Judgment, U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, Case 1:25-cv-00946-CKK (August 15, 2025)).** LDAD filed an amicus brief in an important case challenging

a presidential Executive Order that would unconstitutionally restrict the number of citizens who could register to vote in federal elections.

Through the National Voter Registration Act, Congress had sought to increase voter registration and encourage more citizens to vote in federal elections. The Act directed the Election Assistance Commission to create a uniform federal registration form, enabling citizens to prove their citizenship without a need to provide documentary evidence.

President Trump’s Executive Order, however, directs the Election Assistance Commission to amend the registration form to require applicants to submit documentary proof of citizenship. This Executive Order violates the Constitution’s foundational principle of separation of powers, as only Congress - not the President - has authority to regulate federal elections. The Executive Order also frustrates Congress’s purpose in passing the National Voter Registration Act and violates one of the country’s most fundamental rights: the right to vote. Nonpartisan Plaintiffs, including the League of Latin American Citizens and the League of Women Voters, sued to enjoin enforcement of the documentary evidence requirement

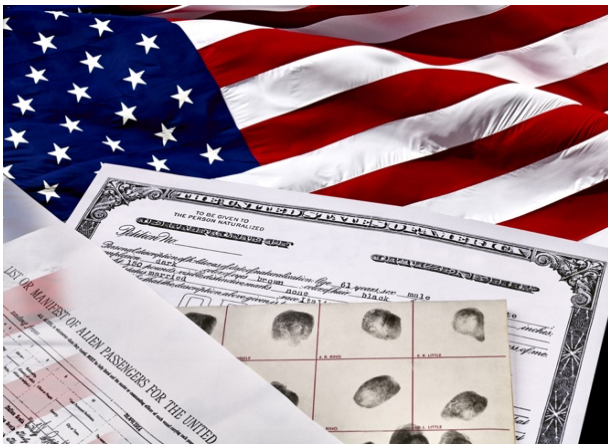


throughout the country. The federal district court granted a preliminary injunction, and the nonpartisan Plaintiffs filed a summary judgment motion asking that the preliminary injunction be made permanent.

Seeking this relief follows the recent ruling in *Trump v. CASA, Inc.* in which the Supreme Court held that the federal courts only have equitable power to issue injunctions that give “complete relief to the plaintiffs” and may not issue “universal” injunctions.

LDAD’s brief presented multiple arguments as to why the injunction to prevent enforcement of the Executive Order nationwide is necessary to provide “complete relief” to the plaintiff organizations and their hundreds of thousands of members around the country, thereby distinguishing the relief in this case from the universal injunction involved in the CASA case.

Positive outcome in *LULAC v. Executive Office of the President*. LDAD is pleased to report that the federal district court in D.C. agreed with plaintiffs that the Executive Order’s documentary evidence requirement violated separation of powers and permanently enjoined the federal defendants from taking “any action to implement” the Order’s documentary evidence requirement. This injunction is critical to preventing the President from unconstitutionally interfering with citizens’ ability to register to vote as the law allows.



***U.S. v. Chief Judge George L. Russell III et al.* (Brief of Lawyers Defending American Democracy and its Maryland Chapter; Lawyers Society for the Rule of Law Institute; and Judge J. Michael Luttig for Leave to File an *Amicus Curiae* Brief in Support of Defendants, U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland, Civil Action No. 1:25-cv-02029 (July 28, 2025)).** The brief argued that the Administration’s lawsuit against the Court, its judges, and the Court Clerk is, in effect, an effort to penalize an entire federal court jurisdiction for rulings the President does not like.

The brief also asserted that, through its lawsuit, the Administration is attempting to interfere with the Court’s inherent authority to manage its own docket and exercise its constitutional authority. In addition, the brief emphasized that the Administration’s position threatens the separation of powers and the rule of law by depriving non-citizen detainees of the right of access to the courts and deprives the court of its constitutional authority to adjudicate cases.

We are pleased to report that the District Court dismissed the Administration’s lawsuit, essentially on the ground that, under the Constitution’s separation of powers, the Executive branch has no authority to seek to enjoin the Judicial branch from exercising its judicial role. Specific bases for dismissal included: lack of the Executive’s standing to sue to seek an injunction against federal judges; the Maryland District Court’s sovereign immunity; the federal judges’ judicial immunity; and the Executive’s lack of statutory or implied authority to bring such a suit. LDAD appreciated the opportunity to work closely with its newly formed Maryland Chapter on this important matter.

***Trump v. Newsom*, Brief of Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law, National Institute for Military Justice, Lawyers Defending American Democracy, and Professors Claire Finkelstein, Brenner Fissell, and Mitt Regan as *Amicus Curiae* in Support of Plaintiff’s Motion for Preliminary Injunction, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of**

California, Case No.: 3:25-CV-04870-CRB (August 21, 2025). LDAD and LDAD Board member Professor Mitt Regan collaborated with the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law at the University of Pennsylvania and the National Institute for Military Justice to file an amicus brief in support of California’s challenge to the President’s deployment of National Guard troops to California.

The brief challenged the two grounds on which the President relied as legal authority for the deployment: (1) inherent authority to protect federal personnel and property and (2) 10 U.S.C. §12406, which authorizes deployment in response to a “rebellion or danger of rebellion” against the authority of the United States or when the President “is unable with the regular forces to execute the laws of the United States.”

The brief pointed out that reliance on the protective power requires that there be a genuine emergency that poses a serious threat, which is not the case in Los Angeles. It then argued that §12406 requires a clear showing of rebellion or an indisputable inability for the U.S. to enforce laws in any other way, and that neither condition exists in Los Angeles. In the absence of legal

authority, the President’s deployment violates the authority of California under the Tenth Amendment to exercise control of its state national Guard forces.

Finally, the brief clarified that neither source of authority constitutes an exception to the Posse Comitatus Act, which prohibits military forces to engage in law enforcement activities. It then described activities by the Guard in Los Angeles that violate this prohibition.

The district court ruled in September that the government violated the Posse Comitatus Act by using federal troops to execute domestic law in the Los Angeles area and issued an injunction prohibiting such activities. On December 12, the court issued a preliminary injunction prohibiting further federalization of the Guard and ordering their return to control by California. The case is currently on appeal.

Joe Neguse, et al. v. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, et al., Brief of Lawyers Defending American Democracy as Amicus Curiae in Support of Plaintiff’s Motion for Stay Under 5 U.S.C. § 705 or, in the Alternative, for Preliminary Injunction, U.S.



District Court for the District of Columbia, Case No. 1:25-cv-2463-JMC (September 16, 2025). LDAD filed an *amicus* brief in support of plaintiffs, arguing that ICE’s policy restricting unannounced visits by Members of Congress “directly violates federal law.” Twelve Members of Congress filed this lawsuit to challenge ICE’s new requirement that lawmakers provide seven days’ notice before visiting ICE detention facilities.

At the plaintiffs’ request, LDAD’s brief focused on two core issues: standing and appropriations law. The denial of access harms individual Members of Congress by violating a statutory right unique to them. In addition, the fact that the provision explicitly granting access without prior notice is in an appropriations law does not affect its legal enforceability.

“Federal law explicitly protects Members of Congress’ right to unannounced oversight visits,” said LDAD board member and Georgetown University Law Center Professor Mitt Regan, a principal author of the brief. “ICE’s policy violates both the letter and spirit of that law.”

The Federal District Court has since issued an injunction against the ICE notification policy.

U.S. v. State of Texas et al., Brief of Amicus Curiae Lawyers Defending American Democracy in Support of Movants-Appellants Students for Affordable Tuition et al., United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, Case No.: 25-10898 (October 4, 2025). LDAD filed an *amicus* brief in *United States v. Texas* warning that the federal government’s attempt to block Texas’s in-state tuition law crosses a constitutional line—using federal immigration authority to control state education law. The brief argued that this violates basic principles of federalism reflected in the Tenth Amendment because it seeks to conscript Texas into enforcing federal immigration policy.

LDAD’s brief focused on the Tenth Amendment and the constitutional principle that the federal

government cannot commandeer states to carry out federal policy.

Trump v. Slaughter, Brief of Amici Curiae Professor Victoria Nourse and Lawyers Defending American Democracy Supporting Respondent, U.S. Supreme Court, No. 25-332 (November 2025). LDAD filed an *amicus* brief in *Trump v. Slaughter*, urging the U.S. Supreme Court not to treat all multimember independent regulatory commissions created by Congress as solely executive agencies that must be wholly controlled by the President.

The issue in *Slaughter* is whether Congress may limit the President’s authority to remove Federal Trade Commission (FTC) commissioners to termination for cause. A larger question, however, is whether the Court will issue a broad opinion that treats all 80 or so multimember commissions as subject to direction by the President, and any efforts by Congress to limit such control as unconstitutional. Among these entities are the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and many others.

LDAD’s brief demonstrated that such a ruling would ignore more than two centuries of American history. Drawing on archival materials and a sweeping review of statutes from the 1780s onward, the brief showed Congress and the Founders regularly created multimember commissions with features designed to provide some independence from political influence.

The brief offered an important historical understanding to the fact that Congress always had the power to create independent bodies that can make impartial decisions free from presidential control.

Critical Resources and Calls to Action
Open Letter to Elite Law Firms, April 23, 2025. LDAD and other lawyers from the highest levels of the profession [issued an open letter](#) calling on elite law firms to join forces against President Trump’s baseless Executive Orders. In



these edicts, President Trump seeks to punish law firms by prohibiting them from representing clients and causes the President disfavours and otherwise involving himself in the operations of the firms' hiring policies and choice of pro bono representation.

LDAD partnered with Lawyers Allied Under Rule of Law and The Steady State. Together these organizations represent thousands of lawyers who have worked at the highest levels of the profession, including as Senior Partners in AmLaw 200 firms, Judges, State Attorneys General, Senior Justice Department Officials, General Counsel of Fortune 500 Companies, and Bar Presidents.

In their open letter, these organizations called on the nation's top firms to develop a unified response in opposing the President's unconstitutional actions and threats to the rule of law and the justice system. The open letter states, in part:

"Donald Trump's Executive Orders targeting more than a dozen of the nation's most prestigious law firms have brought the entire legal profession to a critical juncture.

Four of the elite firms targeted by these Executive Orders have sued the Trump Administration in separate actions, and all four have won temporary restraining orders against the President. The courts found that these firms were likely to prove that the President's actions are illegal, unconstitutional, and unenforceable. As one Judge explained: "The framers of our Constitution would see this as a shocking abuse of power." More than 800 other firms, including 17 of the prestigious firms that comprise the so-called 'AmLaw 200,' have joined amicus briefs in their defense.

These 21 AmLaw 200 who have chosen to fight stand in contrast to the 9 firms that have negotiated 'agreements' with the President, and the 170 firms who have taken no position at all.

LDAD calls on the 170 undeclared AmLaw 200 firms to avoid the path of those now notorious nine. We call on these 170 firms to convene – as a group – to create a unified response to the President's unconstitutional actions and threats to the rule of law and system of justice.

If you are one of these firms, you understand that the threatened executive edicts are not legal or enforceable. Rather, they are a tactic designed to enlist you in undermining the rule of law. Any concession by your

prestigious firms only helps the Administration intimidate the legal profession from challenging its actions.

We ask you to recognize that participating in the Administration 's efforts to pick off individual firms and negotiate with them individually is futile, harmful, and unnecessary. The justice system requires that firms set aside their natural competition and coalesce as a profession at this critical moment."

Meeting the Moment – A Call for Lawyers to Lead. This initiative's goal is to galvanize lawyers across the country to honor their oaths by engaging with their communities on what's at stake and why defending democracy and safeguarding the rule of law in America matters now more than ever.

Meeting the Moment calls on all lawyers to use their skills and expertise to engage other lawyers, friends, businesses, the media, nonprofit organizations, faith communities, civic and community groups, and others in the fight to preserve our democratic institutions.

Key components of Meeting the Moment include:

- Building a network of lawyers in every state to form Rapid Response Teams to address specific challenges immediately as they arise;
- Providing volunteers with clear, concise, and consistent materials to help them in this work. The materials will focus on key concepts (e.g., democracy, rule of law, due process, etc.), why they matter, and how individuals will be affected if democracy is replaced by an authoritarian form of government;
- Sharing information with volunteers about the growing impacts of these threats to the justice system, our democracy, and the rights and liberties of all.

LDAD is forming a growing network of volunteer lawyers to build this movement across the country. At the heart of this effort are State Leads who can help lawyers in their states participate in ways aligned with their skills, relationships, and regional and local needs. We are grateful for the continued dedicated leadership of LDAD volunteer Susan Rubel, a veteran of the Department of Justice, in this effort.

Through the generosity of LDAD's supporters this year, LDAD has engaged consulting assistance to coordinate this effort, including developing materials that participants can tailor and use in their outreach and assisting in effective communications that will help us best reach and engage the public. LDAD welcomes Amanda Cats-Baril, who was recently retained to serve in the role of Project Manager and Content Strategist, and media consultant Arabella Meyer.



Guardians of Justice Initiative. LDAD launched an initiative to encourage lawyers to seek elected office or appointments to public sector roles, and to observe certain fundamental obligations in the process. Lawyers bring unique values, experiences, and skills to the political landscape and, historically, have had a key role in contributing to the political and legal stability of the United States and to the creation of our Constitution. With the insightful support of LDAD volunteer and law student Sean Cailteux, LDAD issued the [Guardians of Justice Toolkit](#). Our hope is to inspire a new wave of lawyers to

seek public leadership roles in our country at the local, state, and national levels and, in doing so, commit to core principles in protecting the rule of law and our democratic institutions.

This effort is in keeping with LDAD's foundational belief that the legal profession has a special obligation to protect the rule of law, to speak up when democracy is threatened, and to lead by inspiration and example. Guardians of Justice takes this belief one step further by encouraging lawyers to bring their unique skills, experiences, and dedication to our country's fundamental values into elected office and key appointed roles in government at a time when these core principles are under unprecedented strain.

The Toolkit provides the following information:

- The ten fundamental principles that lawyers seeking office or appointment to government service should observe;
- The history of lawyers as leaders in government and the decline of lawyers serving in these roles;
- The current state of American democracy and the rule of law;
- Resources for educating on and analyzing the state of American democracy, the rule of law and public opinion on these issues; and
- Ways in which bar associations can use and support this effort.

Guardians of Justice offers an opportunity to reach the profession in a shared goal of educating lawyers about their fundamental obligations to serve as guardrails in protecting democracy and the rule of law, promote civic engagement and civil discourse, and inspire action.

New Series in *The Fulcrum*: The Impact of President Trump's Actions. In partnership



with *The Fulcrum*, a popular and insightful online publication, [LDAD launched a series of articles](#) analyzing: the authoritarian nature and impact of executive actions taken by the Trump administration; their direct links to the Project 2025 authoritarian playbook; and why these actions should matter to everyone. This initiative is led by LDAD volunteers Professor Julie Goldscheid and former Judge Rosalyn Richter.

The Democracy Commitment

Since the formation of our country, lawyers have had the responsibility to defend the underlying constitutional values and norms of political behavior on which our democracy depends. This responsibility is manifested by a lawyer's duty to take an oath to defend the Constitution, imbuing lawyers with a special role in society to protect the rule of law, the values of our democratic institutions, and our justice system.

LDAD created the [Democracy Commitment](#) to ask lawyers throughout the country, including in law firms, corporate law departments, law schools, and bar associations at the national, state, regional, and local level, to use their voices and influence to protect our democratic institutions.

The Democracy Commitment, which was a foundational underpinning to LDAD's Meeting the Moment initiative, provides lawyers with concrete steps – a blueprint for measures they can take to engage the profession and the larger community in a commitment to the adherence to fundamental principles about public discourse,

the right to free and fair elections, and the right of all people to be treated with dignity.

News, Statements, Op-Eds, Letters

Press coverage for LDAD dramatically increased in 2025, with hundreds of mentions of LDAD and its work. This includes nearly 70 op-eds, podcasts, and other content created by LDAD and its leaders, partners, and affiliates. Among some of the more notable content in 2025 are the following:

Meidas Touch Legal AF Podcast: Founder Michael Popok ***Interview with LDAD board chair and co-founder Scott Harshbarger and executive director Lauren Stiller Rikleen***, (December 15, 2025).

Law and Order Podcast: ***Interview with LDAD Executive Director Lauren Stiller Rikleen***.

The Boston Globe: ***In appeasing Trump, law firm surrendered long-held principles***, by Lauren Stiller Rikleen (March 21, 2025).

The Hill: ***The law must not bend to Trump's crusade of political retribution***, by Austin Sarat and Lauren Stiller Rikleen (March 19, 2025)

CNN: ***Interview with LDAD executive committee chair Evan Falchuk***, (March 25, 2025).

Bloomberg Law: ***We Need Law Students to Clean the Stain on the Legal Profession***, by Lauren Stiller Rikleen (April 14, 2025).

WBUR: ***Interview with LDAD Founder Scott Harshbarger*** (April 25, 2025).

Meidas Touch Legal AF Podcast: Melba Pearson ***Interviews with Lauren Stiller Rikleen, July 4, 2025 and November 26, 2025***.

Boston Public Radio (WGBH): ***Interview with Scott Harshbarger and Lauren Stiller Rikleen***, (April 29, 2025).

American Bar Association 50th National Conference on Professional Responsibility, ***Remarks of LDAD co-founder Gershon "Gary"***



Ratner on Criteria for Ethics Complaints (May 30, 2025).

International Bar Association: ***US Presidency: Law Firms Face Targeted Executive Orders that Undermine Independence of Profession*** (May 25, 2025).

The Bulwark: ***‘Alligator Alcatraz’ is a Moral Stain*** by James McHugh (August 13, 2025).

Boston College Law School: ***Panel Discussion ‘Sword or Shield: Bar Discipline in a Polarized Era,’*** including Lauren Stiller Rikleen.

ABA Civil Rights and Social Justice Section Chair Chat: ***Exposing the Autocratic Legal Playbook***, with UCLA Law Professor Scott L. Cummings and Lauren Stiller Rikleen.

Webinar: ***Free Speech Under Siege: Echoes of McCarthyism***, Moderated by LDAD board member Professor Gary Simson with panelists Berkeley Law School Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, Penn Carey Law Professor Kermit Roosevelt, and New York Law Professor Emerita Nadine Strossen.

Webinar: ***From the Social Media Feed to the Courtroom – How Judges and Jurors Remain Impartial***, moderated by LDAD board member and former Florida Chief Justice Peggy Quince, with panelists Catherine A. Christian, a partner at Liston Abramson, former U.S. District Court Judge Nancy Gertner, and former New York Justice Diane Kiesel.

Collaborations

LDAD is proud to work with other organizations that share its concerns about threats to the rule of law and democracy in America. In collaboration, LDAD and partner organizations leverage each other’s capabilities and reach, and demonstrate the many lawyers — across the political spectrum — who are fighting to protect our democratic institutions and the justice system.



This past year, we were honored to establish a pilot LDAD Maryland Chapter under the leadership of Maryland lawyers Donna Hill Staton and M. Natalie McSherry. And Georgetown University Law Center student Sean Cailteux established the first LDAD law student chapter. We are grateful for the opportunities these partnerships offer to model new ways to expand LDAD’s efforts to protect democracy and the rule of law.

FINANCING OUR WORK

This year, LDAD has been honored to earn the support of hundreds of donors. These results reflect that the public is increasingly aware of – and disturbed by – the ongoing assaults on the rule of law, the use of lies as a tool of public policy and legal advocacy, and the disappointing response to it by too many lawyers, law firms, law schools, the organized bar, and elected officials.

The good news is that Americans are starting to understand the dangerous impacts on this country. There is an increasing appreciation for our country’s founding documents, the principles of truthfulness from our government and the media, the critical importance of the rule of law, and the important role lawyers must play to honor their oaths to defend the rule of law and the Constitution. LDAD and its tens of thousands of supporters have been clamoring for this kind of awakening – and it’s happening more every day.

The work is not done. Powerful people are moving at a frenetic pace that continues to undermine the foundations of our constitutional republic. Now, more than ever, every individual and every lawyer has an opportunity to be a part of the fight.

As you consider your year-end giving, and after reviewing our results in 2025 and the work ahead, please include LDAD in your planning. LDAD's impact in the courts, with the organized bar, with lawyers across the country is helping to preserve – and to restore – the honor, integrity, and accountability that keep us free.

LDAD, a careful steward of your contributions, is a 501(c)(3) organization, and all donations are tax deductible. This year, we have been grateful for the part-time assistance of Hannah Zack, our Operations Manager (and current law student).

You can make an electronic tax-deductible donation via [this link](#).

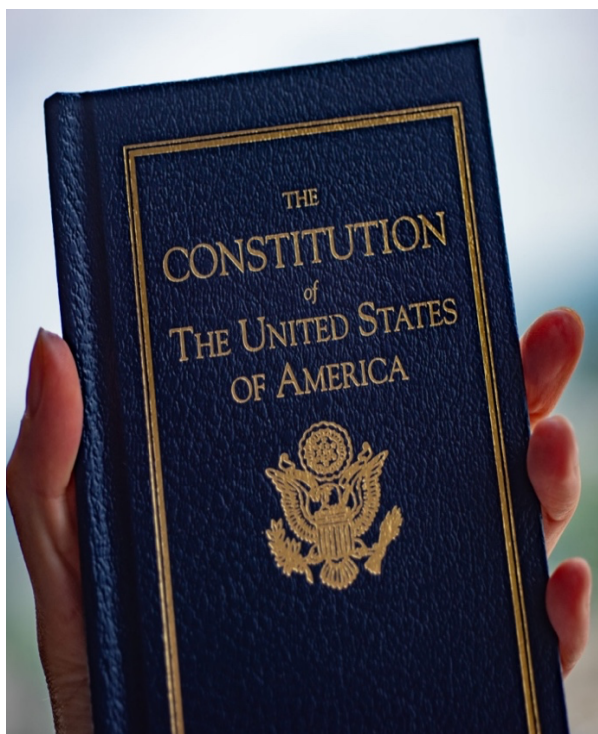
If you prefer to contribute by check, please make the check payable to *Lawyers Defending American Democracy* and mail it to Lawyers Defending American Democracy, P.O. Box 1922, Framingham, MA 01701.

LDAD also accepts donations of stock or other securities. If you would like to donate securities, please contact us at hello@ldad.org.

LOOKING AHEAD

This past year has presented extraordinary challenges to our system of government. Scholars who study the rise of authoritarian playbooks in other countries warn that the window of opportunity to preserve, protect, defend – and fight for – American democracy is growing short. Among our commitments for the future.

LDAD remains resolute. We will work relentlessly on our commitments to:



- Speak out and galvanize both the profession and the public to protect democracy and the rule of law, particularly through our Meeting the Moment initiative;
- Nimble respond to events that fit within [our core principles and fundamental values](#);
- Seek to hold accountable lawyers who violate Rules of Professional Conduct;
- Develop special projects where we can leverage pro bono and other volunteer involvement to increase our influence and promote change;
- Catalogue, highlight, and publicize ongoing State and national policy initiatives that undermine democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental principles of democracy;

- Continue to call on and work with law firms, law school deans, and bar associations to speak out to preserve the rule of law;
- Expand our focus on protecting the independence, integrity, competence, and nonpartisanship of the judiciary. As part of that focus, we will address the Supreme Court's decisions and use of its Shadow Docket to erode personal liberties and civil rights;
- Continue to support the importance of an independent media as a cornerstone of democracy;
- Help lawyers who care about democracy and the rule of law – across the political spectrum – know that they are not alone. We will continue to build coalitions of lawyers who recognize that protecting the rule of law is not a partisan issue;
- Work to organize and galvanize younger Americans, on college campuses and in law schools, to stand up for core democracy principles.

We are pleased to share this report with you and hope you will engage with LDAD in its important work.

LAWYERS DEFENDING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

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